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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004809

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SUBJECT: BAGHDAD'S 9 NISSAN COUNCIL CRITICAL OF PAST
ELECTION BUT OPTIMISTIC FOR THE FUTURE

Classified By: POLCOUNS ROBERT S. FORD FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)
AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Members of Baghdad's 9 Nissan District Advisory Council (DAC) are optimistic about upcoming elections. All but one of 30 members indicated they would vote during the elections. Most opinions were similar to council members in other districts (reftel). However, in 9 Nissan only a limited number of members were seeking national assembly seats in the 15 December elections. These district assembly members also had strong praise for the Independent Election Committee Iraq (IECI). Members expect an exceptionally high turnout of voters and a majority of seats going to Shia parties and candidates. Several councilpersons said they felt Saudi Arabia was attempting to influence the elections but could offer no evidence. This DAC, one of the most culturally diverse councils in Baghdad, is also one of the poorest. Generally, it was critical of the national government, enthusiastic about participating in the elections, and optimistic about the future of democracy in Iraq. This may be bad for incumbents if the trend holds across other disgruntled voters throughout Baghdad Province. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Members of the 9 Nissan DAC convened a meeting to discuss upcoming elections with PolOff November 29. It has large numbers of Shia, Sunni, Kurd, and Christian populations within its boundaries. The DAC is an equally diverse organization. Nearly the entire council devoted two hours to answering questions and providing opinions on the 15 December elections. In general, opinions expressed were similar to those of other DACs in Baghdad (reftel). Council members expect a high turnout of voters (80 to 85 percent). They also expect a strong showing from Kurdish and Sunni parties and candidates. The members feel Shia entities (N.B. the term of preference among the Baghdad's voters) and candidates will achieve the most success. Representatives placed security, justice, unity, democracy and economic development as their leading reasons to vote for a candidate or entity.

13. (C) One difference noted in this discussion, from meetings with other DACs, was that not one council member mentioned religion as a contributing factor for choosing a candidate. Unless prompted, not one council member mentioned they would seek or listen to the advice of a sheikh, imam, politician, or community leader. Also in contrast to other Baghdad district councils, only two members of the 9 Nissan DAC are running for the national assembly.

14. (C) Of note was the strength and depth of compliments given to the IECI. The IECI's conduct during the January elections and October referendum received heavy praise. Some characterized IECI performance as "exceptional during such crucial and explosive events." Council members also agreed international observers and the United Nations performed admirably during the elections. One member suggested the IECI use more local volunteers at polling centers and provide more training for center supervisors. Several agreed that election employees should be permanent staff. Only two members were highly critical of the IECI. They complained too many poll center workers were untrained and unqualified.

15. (C) Members were very vocal and emotional when asked if they perceived attempts from other countries to influence their elections. Though Syria, Jordan, and Iran were mentioned, most council members suggested intense interest and influence came from Saudi Arabia. It was mentioned this influence was being attempted because "the Kingdom feared a democratic state on its borders." When asked what evidence any council person had of attempts to influence elections, no specific examples were forthcoming. One member noted that all countries, even the United States, have outside influences trying to direct their elections. Another member agreed but cautioned that all countries don't have the richest oil country in the world on their borders. As with other councils, the 9 Nissan DAC was nearly unanimous in stating they felt no attempts from Coalition Forces to influence their vote or the outcome of their elections.

16. (C) COMMENT. Members of the 9 Nissan DAC take great

pride in mentioning they were the first DAC established after the fall of Saddam. Several times they said 9 Nissan and the other DACs were the only vestiges of democracy when there was no president or national assembly. But now the DAC feels neglected. Coalition Forces that once showered them with money and projects no longer do so. The national government rarely responds to their requests and snubs their approaches for an audience. Still, these local councils express strong support for the ideals of democracy and an overarching desire to have free, safe, and secure elections. A constant theme during the 9 Nissan meeting was that the current government elected in January had done little to improve the standard of living in Iraq. Yet, DAC members were excited about the opportunity to vote on December 15 and optimistic about the future of democracy in Iraq. END COMMENT.
KHALILZAD